

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2776

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 5522

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR IN

SUBJECT: GOI REACTION TO US NUCLEAR POWER POLICY

1. IN THE ABSENCE OF THE FOREIGN SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS SECRETARY VELLODI CALLED IN THE CHARGE APRIL 15 TO CONVEY INDIA'S INITIAL REACTION TO THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT ON NUCLEAR POWER POLICY. VELLODI'S STATEMENT FOLLOWED A VISIT TO DELHI BY INDIAN ATOMIC ENERGY CHAIRMAN SETHNA AND THEREFORE MAY BE VIEWED AS A CONSIDERED GOI POSITION ON US POLICY AS SET FORTH THUS FAR.

2. INITIALLY, VELLODI REVIEWED INDIAN CONCERNS ABOUT TARAPUR ALONG LINES ALREADY REPORTED TO THE DEPARTMENT. IN REGARD TO THE PRESIDENT'S NUCLEAR POWER STATEMENT, HE SAID THAT FOREIGN SECRETARY MEHTA HAD ALREADY CONVEYED AN INITIAL REACTION (NEW DELHI 5220) TO THE SPECIFIC REFERENCES MADE TO INDIA. CITING THE REFERENCE TO "CANADA'S UNFORTUNATE EXPERIENCE" VELLODI REVIEWED THE LONG INDIAN NEGOTIATIONS WITH CANADA WHICH HAD RESULTED IN AN AGREEMENT WHICH, HOWEVER, THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT DID NOT RATIFY WITH THE RESULT THAT ALL COOPERATION WAS TERMINATED. ALTHOUGH THE GOI COULD HAVE TAKEN THE POSITION THAT CANADA HAD ACTED UNILATERALLY AND THEREFORE MIGHT HAVE ABROGATED THE AGREEMENT, THE GOI HAD NOT PREVENTED THE CONTINUATION OF BILATERAL

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SAFEGUARDS.

3. VELLODI THAN TURNED TO THE SUBSTANTIVE PORTIONS OF THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT EXPLAINING THAT HE UNDERSTOOD FURTHER ELABORATION WOULD BE FORTHCOMING. HE SAID THAT THE GOI HAD STARTED A NUCLEAR POWER PROGRAM 20 YEARS AGO, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT ITS ENERGY NEEDS AND ALTERNATE SOURCES OF POWER.

IT HAD MADE A CONSIDERABLE INVESTMENT IN RESOURCES AND TECHNOLOGY AND COMMITTED THESE FOR THE FUTURE. ANY SUGGESTION THAT THIS PROGRAM SHOULD BE RADICALLY MODIFIED WOULD BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT FOR THE GOI TO ACCEPT. IN REGARD TO THE FAST BREEDER REACTOR, VELLODI SAID, THE GOI WAS INTERESTED IN USING ITS KNOWN LARGE RESOURCES OF THORIUM WHICH WERE OF GREAT IMPORTANCE BECAUSE INDIAN URANIUM RESOURCES ARE OF VERY LOW GRADE. VELLODI SAID THE US MEANING REGARDING EXAMINATION OF NEW FUEL CYCLES WAS UNCLEAR. IF THE US PROPOSAL IMPLIES THAT INDIA MUST SCRAP OR INTRODUCE MODIFICATIONS IN ITS EXISTING AND PLANNED PROGRAMS, THE GOI WOULD BE FACED WITH AN ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TASK.

4. IN CONCLUSION VELLODI SAID THE GOI WAS ALWAYS PREPARED TO DISCUSS THESE NUCLEAR POLICY MATTERS ON A BILATERAL BASIS AS IT HAS BEEN DOING. ITS INITIAL REACTION, HOWEVER, IS ONE OF CONCERN THAT THE US PROPOSAL WOULD PRESENT ALMOST INSURMOUNTABLE DIFFICULTIES FOR THE INDIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM. IN REPLY THE CHARGE DREW FROM STATE 067973 AND THE PRESIDENT'S ANNOUNCEMENT TO INDICATE THAT THE US RECOGNIZES THE IMPORTANCE MANY NATIONS ATTACH TO NUCLEAR POWER AND WISHES TO EXPLORE A VARIETY OF MEASURES TO ASSURE ACCESS BY ALL NATIONS TO NUCLEAR FUEL SUPPLIES AND SPENT FUEL STORAGE. HE SAID THAT CONSULTATIONS ON THESE SUBJECTS WOULD CONTINUE AS US POLICIES ARE REFINED. SCHNEIDER

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